

Head Start has been the premier early childhood education program in the United States for more than 40 years. It has served more than 20 million children and families in that time, and it remains a cornerstone of our efforts to close the achievement gap, combat poverty and provide all Americans with the opportunity to thrive. This is an important program for the Central Coast, and its reauthorization will help thousands of local families.

In late November, Congress passed the "Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act," ( [H.R. 1429](#) ) which reauthorizes and improves the Head Start Program. The bipartisan legislation improves teacher and classroom quality, strengthens Head Start's focus on school readiness, expands access to Head Start for more children, ensures that centers are well-run, boosts coordination between Head Start and state and local programs and improves comprehensive services that help children by helping their families.

Among the many important pieces of the bill, it targets new funding for improving teacher salaries and supporting professional development; provides greater flexibility to serve children whose family income is just above the federal poverty line; prioritizes expansion for Early Head Start (serving children 3 and younger) and programs for migrant children; and strengthens comprehensive services for families of Head Start children.

The bill reauthorizes Head Start through 2012 and increases its funding to \$8 billion by 2010. Each year, this crucial program will provide nearly one million children with the educational opportunities they need to succeed. This is another of the great Democratic accomplishments this year.

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